

***Department
of
Human
Services***

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, June 15, 2006

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METRO DETROIT

Bills would push schools to get tough with bullies

June 15, 2006

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

The Michigan Department of Education is pushing for legislation that would require every school district in the state to have anti-bullying rules.

It's time to go beyond just talking about bullying in schools, said John Austin, vice president of the Michigan Board of Education.

"A few years ago, the board passed a resolution calling on districts to adopt anti-bullying policies," Austin said Wednesday. "It produced some positive attention to bullying as an issue, but it did not produce an uniform anti-bullying policy or practice in all of the school districts."

But legislation introduced in the state House of Representatives and Senate appears to be going nowhere -- lost in committees that apparently have no interest in a vote on the issue.

It's doubtful that the state board's urging will have much effect on opponents who say anti-bullying policies are best left as local decisions.

That's frustrating to state Rep. Glenn Anderson, the Westland Democrat who introduced the House anti-bullying bills.

"Saying the districts should have a policy isn't enough," Anderson said. "We're talking about, in some cases, violence against other kids."

Some students question how much anti-bullying policies can do to stop bullying.

"Most schools do have policies, but the teachers just don't seem to reinforce it," said Betsy Griggs, 16, who will be a junior at Hazel Park High School next school year.

"There was a girl at my school who was constantly bullied and trying to find someone to love her. She got pregnant because she thought the baby would love her. It just made things worse," she said.

Lindsey Eschenburg, 18, said bullying often goes unnoticed by teachers.

"It happens a lot of the times when a teacher wouldn't be able to stop it anyway, like after-school bullying and cyber-bullying" said Eschenburg of Harrison Township, who will be a freshman at Macomb Community College next year.

State Rep. Brian Palmer, R-Romeo, chairman of the education committee, said the anti-bullying bills aren't likely to come out of his committee.

"Whether a school district has an anti-bullying policy should be a local decision, not one made in Lansing, he said Wednesday. "Any school board right now can institute a policy specifically prohibiting bullying."

Others, however, say that more than local control is involved in the stalling.

Sean Kosofsky, policy director for the Triangle Foundation, a Detroit-based advocacy group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, said conservatives don't want to pass a bill that would protect gay students, who often are bullied.

"They see this as a gay bill, even though it affects all kids," Kosofsky said.

Anderson said the gay issue is just one of several excuses for not taking action.

"The fact is ... they are playing politics with our kids," Anderson said.

Contact PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI at 586-469-4681.

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The Alpena News

Man arrested on three-count CSC warrant

A 50-year-old Alpena man was arrested Wednesday on a three-count criminal sexual conduct warrant issued by Alcona County Prosecuting Attorney Thomas Jay Weichel. The warrant came following an investigation conducted by troopers and detectives from the Michigan State Police Alpena Post.

The man has been charged with one count of criminal sexual conduct in the third degree, one count of criminal sexual conduct in the fourth degree and assault with intent to commit sexual penetration. All of the allegations involve a 16-year-old Alpena youth.

Weichel stated "the incident is still under investigation with further charges being considered."

The man was arrested on Wednesday on the charges and is currently lodged in the Alcona County Jail. He was arraigned in the 81st District Court on Wednesday. At this time, the preliminary examination has not been scheduled.

Man allegedly used college computers to see kid porn

OWOSSO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, June 15, 2006

By Linda Angelo

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An Owosso man is accused of downloading child pornography on a computer in a lab at Baker College of Owosso last year and faces several sex-related charges.

Shawn D. Morgan, 31, is scheduled to appear in Shiawassee District Court on Monday.

Police say they found Morgan, who was not a student, downloading the pornography when they approached him inside the lab in May 2005. Police confiscated 54 pictures of child pornography, Owosso Public Safety Director Michael Compeau said.

The investigation took a year because of the time it took to analyze the photos and gather witness statements.

Morgan has been charged with four counts of child sexually abusive activity, three counts of aggravated indecent exposure and four counts of using a computer to commit a crime.

He was also allegedly seen on a surveillance tape masturbating and urinating in the lab.

If convicted, Morgan faces 20 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine on the sexually abusive charges, 2 years in prison and a \$2,000 fine for the aggravated indecent exposure and 20 years or more and a \$20,000 fine on the computer charges.

His preliminary exam is 11 a.m. Monday before Judge Ward L. Clarkson.

Morgan's attorney, Lynn Bowne of Owosso, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

The alleged incidents at Baker College happened for about a month on Fridays and Saturdays, Compeau said.

He said Morgan was seen on tape looking at Internet porn, printing off items and putting them in a bag.

"He ended up putting porn in a trash bag, and we were able to retrieve it out of the trash," Compeau said.

Compeau said Morgan likely gained access to the computer by using some type of generic password.

Baker College President Denise Bannan said the staff became suspicious after computer printouts detected "unwanted sites." She said Morgan was using the computer at off-peak times.

The campus has tightened its security and requires students to show a picture identification before they can use a computer, Bannan said.

"We want to make sure our computers are used in an appropriate fashion," she said.

"We always had good security measures, but we have people who can sometimes come in and find ways around them."

Thursday, June 15, 2006

'I love her,' MySpace suitor says Mideast relatives are upset Mich. teen thwarted in plan to marry man she met on the Internet.

Lisa Martino / The Detroit News

The relatives of a West Bank man whose 16-year-old American girlfriend flew to the Mideast to marry him after they met online are distraught that she has returned home, and say they still hope to bring the couple together.

The family said the girl was even ready to sign a marriage contract and convert to Islam.

But that's news to the family's lawyer and spokeswoman, Renee Wood.

"We only just learned that through the interview (with his family). We did not know she was going to do (sign a marriage contract) that," Wood said.

She couldn't confirm the teen planned to convert to Islam.

Last week, Katherine Lester slipped out of her mother's house in Gilford, Mich., and boarded a flight to Israel, where the mother of her prospective groom was waiting to take her to Jericho.

But U.S. authorities, who tracked her down through the popular MySpace.com Web site where she had met 20-year-old Abdullah Jinzawi, intercepted her in Amman, Jordan Friday, seized her passport and forced her to go home. She has been in seclusion with her father since late Friday.

In a message posted on Jinzawi's Myspace account Wednesday, Katherine Lester appeared reaffirm her love for her Internet suitor, saying, "I love you so much."

The posting, entered Wednesday morning, reads: "Hi baby!!! I MISS U!!! I swear you are so adorable. I love you and no one will change that ever ... I love you so much ... I cant wait to be with you and to hold your hand and to whisper in your ears that i love you,"

Sana Jinzawi, Abdullah's mother, said her son is heartbroken and insisted the two are in love.

"She was going to sign a marriage contract as soon as she got here," she said, adding that she told Katherine to "bring a pink dress for the engagement party and a white dress for the wedding."

"She wanted to convert to Islam and wear the head covering and live with us and adopt our culture," she said.

Lester's parents could not be reached Wednesday.

Jericho is a place of relative calm in the strife-torn West Bank, where Israelis and Palestinians frequently clash.

Abdullah Jinzawi is no longer giving interviews. But in a phone interview with WNEM-TV in Saginaw on Saturday, he said he met Katherine on the site seven months

ago, that he was a wealthy businessman and that he wanted to marry her. He said he sent her the money for the flight.

"I love her, and no one can pull me away from her," he told the station. "She's only mine, you know, and I do love her a lot."

He said he still plans to marry her, once she is old enough.

Sana Jinzawi said she traveled to Ben-Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv to greet the would-be bride last week.

"When she didn't arrive, it was a sad day for us. All kinds of thoughts went through our heads and we asked the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, and they told us she went back to the U.S. from Jordan," she said.

The mother said her family was taken aback by the attention the case has received. They insist they did not want to hurt the girl and had no idea she had acted without her parents' consent.

Back in Gilford, Wood said the family is overwhelmed by the media attention.

"At one point, there were 100 calls a day from all over the country. One was even as far away as Jordan," she said.

The FBI and the Tuscola County Sheriff's Department are trying to determine whether any laws were broken because of Lester's age. The age of sexual consent in Michigan is 16. She turns 17 June 21.

"Neither of them are giving up on each other," Sana Jinzawi said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. You can reach Lisa Martino at (313) 222-5374 or lmartino@detnews.com.

Published June 15, 2006

Dunnings: Releasing case details unfair

Prosecutor says he may resort to using grand juries

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III - upset over the release of details in a local murder case - is considering using grand juries to ensure evidence remains secret.

The Tuesday morning release of previously sealed transcripts in the murder case against Dr. Charles William Mercer has led Dunnings to consider the prosecutorial tool, rarely used in state courts in Michigan.

"I might have to start using grand juries," Dunnings said Wednesday, "to make sure the same thing doesn't happen in other cases."

Mercer, 72, has been charged with open murder in the 1968 death of his wife, Sally Sue Mercer.

The transcripts revealed Sally Mercer suspected her husband was having an affair and that she was afraid he might kill her. The sealed testimony, which led to Charles Mercer's arrest, also indicated a now-deceased pathologist may have covered up the cause of death.

Dunnings said the release of such information before the case has gone to court jeopardizes a defendant's right to a fair trial - which he said is a prosecutor's obligation to ensure.

"I don't think it's fair to a defendant to have information ... be released to the public without the opportunity for cross-examination and without giving the defense the opportunity to present information on its own behalf," he said.

Dunnings also said he is "giving serious consideration" to appealing District Judge Rosemarie

Aquilina's decision to release the transcripts.

Grand jury seldom used

Grand juries, which are closed proceedings, are rare in Michigan. During a grand jury hearing, prosecutors present evidence and call witnesses - often without the defense present - to bring charges against a defendant.

Before 2001, state law said that even if a grand jury indicted someone, a defendant still was entitled to a preliminary hearing, which determines if a case advances to trial.

"As a prosecuting attorney, that defeated the purpose of having a grand jury," Clinton County Prosecutor Chuck Sherman said. "There was no benefit to it."

In 2001, a state Supreme Court decision took away a defendant's right to a preliminary hearing after an indictment. But Sherman admitted that in his 17-year tenure as prosecutor, he has not yet found a reason to use a grand jury in an individual criminal case.

Both Sherman and Dunnings empaneled a grand jury in a mid-1990s drug case that involved multiple counties.

Drug cases that cross county lines is where the use of grand juries is becoming more common, said attorney F. Martin Tieber, former president of the Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan.

"The key is secrecy," he said. "It chokes off the right of the defense to cross-examine witnesses."

But empaneling a grand jury is cumbersome, he said: Jurors have to be chosen and witnesses each can have their own attorney.

In his 32 years of doing criminal appeals, Tieber could recall only one case that involved a grand jury indictment - and that case went to a preliminary hearing.

Appeal type is familiar

If Dunnings appeals Aquilina's decision to release court transcripts in the Mercer case, it would

be the second time he has fought this battle. He also sought to suppress a detective's testimony that led to charges being filed against **Tim and Lisa Holland**, who are scheduled to stand trial this fall in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son Ricky.

Aquilina overturned another judge's decision that would have kept the testimony from the public.

A hearing on that appeal is set for August.

Dunnings expects to make a final decision about the appeal in the Mercer case next week.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

WAYNE COUNTY

Area seniors were prey in scheme

Belleville case called 'tip of iceberg'

June 15, 2006

BY CECIL ANGEL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A man who Sumpter Township police said stole more than \$42,000 from a Belleville woman in a reverse mortgage scheme was charged Wednesday with fraud in what may be the first of more than three dozens cases in metro Detroit, the Wayne County prosecutor said.

Anthony James, 43, of Romulus may have cheated as many as 38 metro senior citizens out of at least \$1 million in the reverse mortgage scheme, Prosecutor Kym Worthy said. He was arraigned in 34th District Court in Romulus before Judge Brian Oakley on one count of uttering and publishing and one count of larceny by conversion of \$20,000 or more.

James is accused of cashing a check for \$42,667.11 that should have gone to Shirley Schultz, 84, of Belleville.

James is being held in the Wayne County Jail in lieu of a \$1-million bond. His preliminary examination is scheduled for June 28 at 34th District Court.

Attempts to reach James or his attorney were unsuccessful Wednesday.

If convicted of the uttering and publishing charge, he could receive up to 14 years in prison. If convicted of larceny by conversion, he could spend up to 10 years in prison.

"We feel this is just the tip of the iceberg," Worthy said.

According to authorities, Schultz contacted the San Francisco-based Financial Freedom Senior Funding Corp. in November 2003 after seeing one of their TV ads for reverse mortgages. After calling the company's 800 number, she was directed to Park Place Mortgage Co. in Romulus.

James met with Schultz several times over a 12-month period in her home to process paperwork. He convinced her to forego a mandatory counseling meeting explaining the reverse mortgage process, Worthy said.

At the time of the closing, James instructed the title insurance company to issue two checks. Both checks were payable to Schultz: one for \$61,325.79 and the other for \$42,667.11.

In January 2004, Schultz received the larger check, thinking that was the total amount of the loan.

It wasn't until Financial Freedom began sending her statements indicating she owed \$131,000 that she knew there was something wrong.

When she contacted the company, she was told her loan was for \$103,992.90 with interest at 6%, giving her a total of \$131,000 of debt.

She later learned that a second check had been issued and cashed. The check had her forged signature along with James' signature.

"They're going to do everything they can to make everyone whole," said Justin Meise, spokesman for Financial Freedom.

He explained that Park Place Mortgage had an arm's-length contractual relationship with the company and that relationship has now been terminated.

He said that Financial Freedom originated 1,385 loans in Michigan in 2005, totaling \$70,350,793.00.

From 2003 through 2005, the company originated 3,344 reverse mortgage loans totaling more than \$171 million.

A reverse mortgage is a home equity loan that allows the borrower, generally age 62 or older, to tap into his or her home's equity. Unlike a conventional loan, the loan does not have to be repaid until the homeowner dies, relocates or sells the property.

Paul Verkerke, vice president at Park Place Mortgage in Livonia, said James stopped working for the company a year ago, leaving on his own.

When at the company, he worked from his Romulus home, he said.

"Obviously, we had no participation in his alleged activities," Verkerke said.

Contact CECIL ANGEL at 313-223-4531 or angel@freepress.com.

ARE YOU A VICTIM?

- Anyone who may have experienced reverse mortgage fraud can contact the Elder Abuse Unit of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office at 313-224-6304.

Elderly Sumpter woman loses \$42,000 in mortgage scam

Documents seized from fraud suspect indicate more victims

Thursday, June 15, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A Romulus man who allegedly bilked an 83-year-old woman out of \$42,000 in a mortgage scam is in jail, and Sumpter Township Police believe that case may be just the tip of an iceberg.

Detective John Toth said the woman went to police on March 6 to tell them that she set up a reverse mortgage on her house. A reverse mortgage allows the homeowner to live in the house and draw monthly payments from the mortgage. On the homeowner's death, the house becomes the property of the mortgage holder.

But when the woman went to draw on the mortgage, there was no money.

Toth said Officer Danielle Buccellano obtained search warrants for the bank, mortgage company and title companies, and finally obtained enough evidence to serve a search warrant on the suspect, a 43-year-old Romulus man, at his home Tuesday night.

Toth said police seized "boxes and boxes" of financial records, several vehicles and the man's computer. He said some of the records can be traced to California, and he expects many more victims to be identified, in many jurisdictions.

He said the man was scheduled to be arraigned today on fraud charges that carry a maximum 10-year prison term on conviction.

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

What's New

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Spotlight Feature

Michigan—Leading the Way in Transforming State Systems

The Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative has emerged as a leader in developing advocates of young adults who are transitioning from the foster care system. These young adults, in partnership with the state Department of Human Services (DHS) and community leaders across the state, have led the way in developing recommendations that will positively affect the foster care system.

A coalition representing youth boards across Michigan developed a message to policymakers, called *Voice*, and presented it to DHS Director Marianne Udow and key DHS staff. They also shared it at the first meeting of the Michigan task force on permanency and at a legislative breakfast that they hosted. Youth board members now are scheduling appointments with their legislators as well as key committee members and chairs. Governor Jennifer Granholm invited them to meet with her and her Cabinet to present *Voice*. (Read youths' recommendations in *Voice*.) That meeting resulted in top government officials volunteering to be mentors for older youth in and out of care and in several departments giving priority to foster youth for paid internships and summer jobs.

Permanency—The Key to Successful Youth Transitioning from Care

At the request of the Michigan legislature, DHS has convened a statewide task force to address the issues of older youth in and aging out of foster care. The task force is co-chaired by Michigan DHS Director Marianne Udow and Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan. Committees include education, employment, mental health, physical health, housing, and permanency. Each committee is co-chaired by a staff person from the appropriate state department and a youth board member. The committees have been identifying existing services and gaps and will present their full recommendations to DHS in June. In September, DHS will report to the legislature about the needs of these young people. The committees also have identified a need for better information about resources and services for youth, care givers, teachers, health care providers, and others who touch the lives of these young people. A youth-friendly website is being proposed. Other proposals include:

A smart card for each youth in care that would include school records, immunization and health care records, and other critical information.

A priority for Section 8 housing waivers.

Specialized foster care workers for adolescents, so they will be more knowledgeable about their needs and available resources.

Specialized school counselors to assist students with college admissions and financial aid and to make sure foster youth (and others) have access to all available resources.

An option for foster youth to stay in care until 21.

Automatic extension of Medicaid to 21.

Mentors—A Key Ingredient to Permanency

Last year, the state youth boards kicked off their official recruitment of mentors around a screening of “Aging Out,” the documentary shown on PBS. Through the recruitment efforts of Justice Corrigan and Director Udow, each member of the five Wayne County youth boards now has been matched with a mentor. Udow is scheduling editorial board meetings with newspapers around the state to discuss transitioning foster youth. In each meeting, she brings one or two youth board members to share their stories and advocate for community involvement.

More about Michigan in the Next eUpdate!

Learn more about all Michigan youth boards and activities in our next eUpdate this summer

FEMA fraud debated

Congress, agency spar over extent of hurricane cases

June 15, 2006

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON -- A congressional study presented Wednesday concluded that FEMA may have been bilked out of as much as \$1.4 billion after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita last year.

"The bad news continues as we realize investigators are only in the beginning stages of their ongoing, comprehensive legislation," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, chairman of a House homeland security investigations panel.

Donna Dannels, acting deputy director of recovery for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said the agency knows of fraud. But she cast doubt on the study, telling the subcommittee that the Government Accountability Office looked at only 0.01% of the 2.5 million applications for aid.

The conclusions, she said, "represent a fraction of the overall assistance provided."

In the study, the GAO used a statistical analysis to estimate the fraud, saying it was 95% confident that improper and potentially fraudulent payments were between \$600 million and \$1.4 billion -- or as much as 16% of the individual assistance after the two hurricanes.

Gregory Kutz, the GAO's managing director of forensic audits and special investigations, said FEMA may be having trouble accepting the results because its director, R. David Paulison, previously testified the fraud rate was 2 to 3%.

The GAO concluded that FEMA paid for season football tickets, a tropical vacation and a sex change procedure. Prison inmates, a supposed victim who used a New Orleans cemetery for a home address and a person who spent 70 days at a Hawaiian hotel all got help.

GAO special agent John Ryan said that once an applicant gets aid, there's no control over how the money is spent.

FEMA has said it has identified more than 1,500 cases of potential fraud after Katrina and Rita and has referred those cases to the Homeland Security Department's inspector general.

The GAO's findings were much higher. The agency said it found people lodged in hotels often were paid twice, because FEMA gave them individual rental aid and paid hotels directly.

FEMA paid millions of dollars to more than 1,000 registrants who used names and Social Security numbers belonging to state and federal prisoners for expedited housing assistance, the study found.

FEMA also couldn't establish that 750 debit cards worth \$1.5 million even went to Katrina victims, the auditors said.

"Our forensic audit and investigative work showed that improper and potentially fraudulent payments occurred mainly because FEMA did not validate the identity of the registrant, the physical location of the damaged address, and ownership and occupancy of all registrants at the time of registration," GAO officials said.

Bloomberg News contributed to this report.

Thursday, June 15, 2006

Michigan snubs innovative way to rein in health costs

Accounts give Medicaid patients an incentive to spend tax dollars wisely

Shikha Dalmia

The Detroit News

Dick DeVos, the Republican gubernatorial candidate, has promised to provide Michigan voters this November with a clear alternative to Gov. Jennifer Granholm's big government policies. One way he might accomplish this is by promising to try his best to enroll Michigan in the federal Health Opportunity Account initiative so it can reduce soaring health care costs.

Written by Michigan's own Congressman Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, the initiative offers a bold way of reining in double-digit cost increases in Medicaid -- the joint federal-state health insurance program for the poor -- while still delivering better care and more choice to users.

Many states have already approached the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to become part of this demonstration project. The 10 states that are eventually selected will automatically get a waiver from federal regulations to adopt market-friendly Medicaid reform.

State rejects Rogers' plan

But Granholm has responded to Rogers' letter alerting her to the program with a barely repressed yawn. In her reply, she ignores his initiative, exhorting him instead to line-up behind her Michigan First Health Care Plan.

Patterned after the recent universal health care plan enacted in Massachusetts, Granholm's plan proposes to cover all of Michigan's million or so uninsured by expanding government programs and offering a slew of subsidies and incentives to private parties -- insurers, employers -- to cover more people.

But an administration that can't ensure cost-effective coverage for those already in its care has no business tackling the health care needs of additional populations.

Even before Michigan's tottering economy began dumping unemployed workers onto the Medicaid rolls, the program's costs were spiraling out of control. Four years ago, Medicaid consumed 20 percent of the general fund budget; now it gobbles close to 25 percent, according to the House Fiscal Agency. Medicaid spending has risen by more than 40 percent since 2000.

Medicaid spending soars

While spending on nearly every other service from higher education to human services has declined as a share of general fund revenues, it has increased by 5.6 percent for the Department of Community Health -- a bulk of whose budget is devoted to Medicaid.

In fact, Medicaid is continuing to crowd out other government services despite the fact that Michigan has already implemented all the obvious remedies to squeeze out inefficiencies. It has, for instance, herded Medicaid beneficiaries into managed care plans, cut provider payments and slashed benefits.

Rogers' Health Opportunity Act offers Michigan an approach that would deliver quality care for Medicaid users without busting the budget: voluntary health care savings accounts.

These accounts would give Medicaid participants a lump sum of money to purchase health coverage that best suits their needs. Participants would be allowed to roll any unused funds into the next year. What's more they could keep any accumulated funds when they leave Medicaid.

Accounts help patient needs

The accounts would effectively turn Medicaid from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan, capping the state's Medicaid liabilities. They would also offer participants a powerful financial incentive to spend wisely, bringing down the overall cost of the program. But best of all, notes Rogers, for the first time a segment of a population not in the habit of saving will be able to stash away something toward its future.

South Carolina, which recently implemented health savings accounts, expects to save upwards of \$300 million over five years through them. Michigan's savings are likely to be twice as much because its Medicaid population is nearly twice as large as South Carolina's. Florida too has implemented Medicaid savings accounts, and Oklahoma is finalizing its plan to do so.

Two distinct approaches to health care reform are emerging around the country with blue states like Massachusetts expanding the role of government and red states like South Carolina empowering consumers. Granholm is embracing the first. In the interest of the health of the state budget and Medicaid users, DeVos ought to pick the second.

Shikha Dalmia is a Metro Detroit-based senior analyst with Reason Foundation, a Los Angeles-based free market group. E-mail: letters@detnews.com.

Action needed now, long-term care reformers say

Thursday, June 15, 2006

By Sharon Emery
Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- The Michigan House is dragging its feet on a bill that would give Michigan residents a central place to go when faced with overwhelming long-term care decisions, advocates for elderly and disabled people say.

Although the so-called "Single Points of Entry" bill implementing the system statewide has more than 40 bipartisan sponsors, advocates fear the political will to bring it up for a vote may be lacking in the face of nursing home opposition. A House committee unanimously voted to send the bill to the full House last month.

"Consumers should not have to chase after long-term care information from a bewildering array of multiple sources, but right now that's the reality Michigan families face," Bill Knox of AARP Michigan said at a Capitol rally Wednesday. "House Bill 5389 ... makes sense and is needed now."

The bill's lead sponsor is Rep. Rick Shaffer, R-Three Rivers.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Medicaid Long Term Care Task Force recommended last year that single points of entry be created locally to help people sort out their financial and care options when they become debilitated.

Last week, the Department of Community Health announced that nearly \$35 million would be awarded to four single-points-of-entry demonstration sites for a 27-month period starting in July.

Michigan currently spends more than \$2 billion in public and private funds for 1.2 million people receiving long-term care, according to the health department.

The hope is that ultimately the system might save money by offering people more opportunity to receive care where they want it, which is often in their homes.

Bill Mania, a member of the state's Long Term Care Commission and a former nursing home resident who now lives independently, said the cost of his care dropped \$16,000 annually once he started receiving home care.

"It's a money-saver in the long term," Mania said of single points of entry.

But Matt Resch, a spokesman for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, said the speaker is just using caution in the face of potentially expensive reform. It's unlikely the legislation will be taken up before the results of the demonstration projects are in, probably in late 2008, he said.

"The last thing we want to do is put in place any system that might lead to more government bureaucracy for families," Resch said.

Advocates for the elderly applaud the demonstration sites, but say the intent of the sites was never to hold up a statewide rollout of single points of entry.

Sarah Slocum, the state's long-term care ombudsman, said more than 30 states already use the system and that Michigan is "out of step" in delaying reform.

"The most expensive thing we can do is to do nothing," Slocum said.

But the Health Care Association of Michigan, which represents more than 400 for-profit nursing homes, argued that waiting just makes sense.

"We are asking the Legislature to wait for the completion of the single-points-of-entry program before moving forward with legislation to regulate and pay for a program that has not been tested," Reg Carter, president and CEO of the group, said in a written statement.

He also predicted that the system would not save money because the people now in nursing homes would be there under any system, due to their health care needs.

WAYNE COUNTY

Chalk-throwing boy detained

Highland Park teacher unhurt in case

June 15, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Some kids are known to lose their heads on the last day of school.

A 14-year-old boy did Tuesday at Highland Park High School and ended up spending the night in the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility.

According to a report by the Wayne County Sheriff's Department, the teen opened the door to the art classroom Tuesday morning and twice pelted the 58-year-old art teacher with bits of chalk.

Then he ran down the hall, but he returned a few minutes later and threw another handful of chalk bits into the teacher's face, the report said.

According to the report, the boy said: "You can't suspend me because it's the last day of school!"

He then ran down the hallway but soon was caught by a school liaison officer.

The teacher was not seriously hurt, just stunned. The boy, who already was wanted for a pending school truancy charge, was admitted promptly to the juvenile detention facility.

He appeared Wednesday before Wayne County Family Court Referee Mary Anne Quinn, who set a \$1,000 personal bond, pending a July 11 pretrial hearing. He was released to the custody of his mother.

Robert Davis, president of the Highland Park School Board, said the boy was mistaken to believe that the last day of school means a pass for bad behavior.

"Yes, he can be suspended pursuant to the revised school code," Davis said. "If the incident was that serious, I'm pretty sure that he will be brought before the board and the superintendent for a possible expulsion hearing."

The last day of school "doesn't excuse him from any possible punishment allowable under the state statute," Davis said.

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Domestic Violence Board To Meet

MIRS, Wednesday, June 14, 2006

The state Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board will meet from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Friday, June 16 at the Grand Tower in Lansing.

The governor charged the board with coordinating domestic violence services. The June agenda includes the chair's report, the executive director's report and a discussion about monitoring to assure organizational performance.

Published June 15, 2006

[From theLansing State Journal]

Free meal service set at Lansing sites

Lansing schools' summer food service programs begin soon at many sites across the city. Free breakfasts and lunches will be available to anyone 18 or under and older persons who are physically or mentally handicapped. Sites will not serve on July 4.

Baker/Donora Focus Center
840 Baker St.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8:30 a.m.
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.

Marvin E. Beekman Center
2901 Wabash Road
June 19 - Aug. 17
Lunch: 11 a.m.
Closed July 3 - July 7

Black Child & Family Institute
835 W. Genesee St.
June 19 - July 27
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Boys & Girls Club of Lansing
4315 Pleasant Grove
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: Noon

Countryside Manor
14379 Webster Road - Bath
June 14 - Aug. 4
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.

Cristo Rey Community Center
1717 N. High St.
June 26 - Aug. 4

Breakfast: 8:30 a.m.
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.

Dwight Rich Middle School
2600 Hampden Drive
June 19 - July 21
Breakfast: 7:30 a.m.

Forest View Elementary School
3119 Stoneleigh Drive
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Foster Community Center
200 N. Foster St.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 9:30 a.m.
Lunch: 12:30 p.m.

Gier Community Center
2400 Hall St.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 9:30 a.m.
Lunch: 12:30 p.m.

Grand River Elementary Magnet School
1107 E. Grand River Ave.
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Hildebrandt Housing
3122 N. Turner St.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m.

LaRoy Froh Housing
2400 Reo Road
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m.

Letts Community Center
1220 W. Kalamazoo St.

June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 9:30 a.m.
Lunch: 12:30 p.m.

Lewton Elementary School
2000 Lewton Place
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.

LMT Community Center
2645 W. Holmes Road
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 9 a.m.
Lunch: Noon

Mount Hope Elementary School
1215 E. Mt. Hope Ave.
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

North Elementary School
333 E. Miller Road
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Mt. Vernon Housing
3338 N. Waverly Road
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m.

North Network Center
847 W. Willow Ave.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m.

Otto Middle School
500 E. Thomas St.
June 19 - July 21
Breakfast: 7:30 a.m.

Reo Elementary School
1221 Reo Court

July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Riddle Elementary School
221 Huron St.
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Salvation Army
525 N. Pennsylvania Ave.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.

Shabazz Academy
1028 W. Barnes Ave.
June 14 - July 13
Breakfast: 8 a.m.
Lunch: Noon

South Lansing Ministries
4301 S. Waverly Road
June 19 - Aug. 4
Lunch: Noon
No Meals on 6/23, 6/30, 7/7

Southside Community Coalition
2101 W. Holmes Road
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 8:30 a.m.
Lunch: Noon

Wainwright Elementary School
4200 Wainwright Ave.
June 14 - Aug. 4
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Lunch: Noon

Woodcreek Elementary Magnet School
4000 Woodcreek Lane
July 10 - July 27
Breakfast: 7:45 a.m.
Closed Fridays

Source: Lansing School District Lansing State Journal

Food giveaway set for Tuesday at Church

Hometown Headlines

BURTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, June 15, 2006

By George Jaksa

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Food will be given away from 1-4 p.m. Tuesday at Deliverance Tabernacle, 4089 Fenton Road, in a program sponsored by the church and Crossover Downtown Outreach Ministries of Flint.

Jobless rate drop has a catch

Worker exits help state hit 4-year low of 6%

June 15, 2006

BY JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Michigan's unemployment rate dropped to its lowest point in more than four years in May, but economists warned it was more bad news than good -- a symptom of people fleeing the workforce by taking buyouts, leaving the state and otherwise giving up job searches.

Economists also cautioned that a statistical oddity or error might have played a part in the unusually large drop in the rate, which reached its lowest point in Michigan since February 2002.

Moreover, the decline from 7.2% in April to 6.0% in May still left Michigan hovering well above the national unemployment average of 4.6%.

New job creation appeared to be negligible. In one survey, Michigan's employers shed 19,000 payroll jobs during the month, with big losses recorded in manufacturing (down 4,000 jobs), leisure and hospitality services (down 7,000), government (down 7,000) and professional and business services (down 3,000).

"Labor force levels can fluctuate significantly from month to month," said Rick Waclawek, director of the state Department of Labor and Economic Growth's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "In this case, employment and unemployment levels in May were very similar to January totals."

One person who fled the Michigan workforce was Amy Schumaker, 43, who quit her job June 1 as a flight attendant at Mesaba Airlines. Worried about Mesaba's bankruptcy filing in October, she left Northwest's commuter carrier after working there for 7 1/2 years.

Schumaker, who was based at Detroit Metro Airport, has been unemployed since then and is looking for work from her home in Rochester, N.Y. But on Wednesday, Schumaker said she told her doctor: " 'I've never felt more comfortable and relaxed.' She said to me, 'You look it.' She said, 'You look so much better.' "

Charles Ballard, professor of economics at Michigan State University, said that month-to-month fluctuations in the unemployment rate are often due to a "weird blip" in the survey data rather than solid evidence of change.

In reality, he said, the state's jobless trend "wasn't that bad in April, and it didn't improve so much in May."

The state's second survey, which looks at households, showed Michigan's civilian labor force lost 66,000 people in May. East Lansing-based economic consultant Patrick Anderson said that number was probably unreliable. "It's such a huge number that it's probably a statistical error," he said.

Economists agreed that the long-term trend in Michigan wasn't pretty.

Beginning around late 2000, Michigan began shedding jobs, particularly in its auto-manufacturing sector, and it hasn't stopped yet. Roughly one in four factory jobs in the state has disappeared since the peak of the most recent boom, in the late 1990s.

Even if the May survey figures were skewed, Anderson said, "the survey underlines how skittish Michigan workers are and the large percentage of Michigan workers that are actively seeking to leave the workforce, either by retiring early, taking a buyout, stopping their job search or moving out of state."

Michigan's ailing labor market has emerged as the top issue in this year's campaign for governor. The race pits Gov. Jennifer Granholm against Republican businessman Dick DeVos.

But Ballard said neither candidate could rightly claim to have any magic solutions for Michigan's hard-hit manufacturers. He pointed out that the state's job losses began under former Gov. John Engler, a Republican, and continued under Granholm, a Democrat.

"If Dick DeVos had been elected four years ago, the Michigan economy would look very much as it does now," Ballard said. "The percentage of the economy that's in manufacturing has been declining for half a century. That's not a blip, that's a trend. And if you're in a state like Michigan, which is much more involved in manufacturing than the average state, that's going to cause problems for you."

Contact JOHN GALLAGHER at 313-222-5173 or gallagher@freepress.com. Business writer Jewel Gopwani contributed to this report.

June 14, 2006

JOBLESS RATE PLUNGES BUT EMPLOYMENT SLIPS

Michigan's unemployment rate took a surprisingly steep plunge in May, dropping by 1.2 percentage points, but it was entirely due to a declining workforce rather than increased jobs, the state's monthly survey of employers showed. Even with the loss of 4,000 jobs, the May rate stood at an even seasonally adjusted rate of 6 percent, leaving the jobs picture similar to what it was in January when the state experienced several months of growth in the labor force.

The Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives in the Department of Labor and Economic Growth noted the employment has held relatively steady for the first five months of 2006, but the unemployment rate has been pushed up, and now down again, by changes in the labor force.

"Labor force levels can fluctuate significantly from month to month," Rick Waclawek, bureau director said. "At times a longer-term view can be a better indicator in assessing labor force levels. In this case, employment and unemployment levels in May were very similar to January totals."

Historically, the state's labor force grows again as it hits the true summer months.

The rate is .8 percentage points lower than in May 2005. Officials also note that the average unemployment rate so far in 2006 is very close to the average for all of last year.

Michigan's April rate was the second worst of any state in the country, ahead of only the 7.7 percent rate in Mississippi. They were two of five states with rates higher than 6 percent; no other state had a rate worse than 5.5 percent.

Liz Boyd, spokesperson for Governor Jennifer Granholm, agreed that it is important to consider the long-term picture, but added, "There's no denying that our employment levels are suffering from the Bush trade policies. The greatest job losses we've experienced are in the manufacturing sector."

Ms. Granholm continues to criticize President George W. Bush for not enforcing trade policies that help domestic manufacturers – and particularly the auto industry – to compete internationally.

John Truscott, spokesperson for Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, said the unemployment picture indicated, "tens of thousands of people have given up looking for jobs in Michigan. And the sad thing is that probably impacts hundreds of thousands of families."

Workers in the state now know that efforts to change things have failed, Mr. Truscott, because they have given up trying to find work.

In May, when manufacturing lost another 4,000 jobs for the month capping a 24,000 drop over the past 12 months, only one industrial sector saw job growth: the 1,000 added for education and health services which posted its fourth consecutive monthly gain. That sector grew by 5,000 since May 2005 and job growth was also posted over that year's time by professional and business services (up 7,000) and financial activities (up 3,000).

Aside from manufacturing, government employment took the next biggest job losses, both for the month and over the past year, dropping by 7,000 and 10,000 respectively as the overall state numbers were 19,000 and 27,000 respectively. Retail trade was down 1,000 jobs for the month and lost 9,000 jobs since May 2005. Despite losing 7,000 jobs in May, leisure and hospitality services job numbers were still 2,000 higher than a year ago.

The change brought Michigan's rate a little closer to the national average, which had dropped by .1 percentage points to 4.6 percent.

For the month, the seasonally adjusted data for the civilian workforce showed it dropped by 66,000 to 5.09 million; that number was 12,000 less than in May 2005.

The 4,000 drop in the number of employed persons in May still left employment at 29,000 persons more than the 349,000 who had jobs in May 2005.

The unemployment rate in the Detroit-Warren-Livonia statistical area dropped by 1.3 percentage points to 6.1 percent, with the rate change against driven by a drop in the labor force, which went down by 29,000 persons to 2.17 million.

METRO DETROIT

GIVING AND LIVING: Caring when others don't

June 15, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Who is she?	Irina Tikhonova of Royal Oak
What keeps her busy?	A classically trained musician and music teacher, she plays cello with the Flint Symphony and Dearborn Symphony orchestras. She is a substitute cellist for the Michigan Opera Theatre and Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and is in the Adventure Cello Quartet, which will play at 7 p.m. today at Borders Books on Woodward in Birmingham. She volunteers at CARE House in Pontiac, the home of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County.
How'd she get here?	Born in Ukraine, when it was part of the former Soviet Union, Tikhonova was raised by an aunt in Kiev. She was there on April 26, 1986, when a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, about 100 kilometers north, leaked radioactive material into the atmosphere. "The people didn't know, not until May 2, and then we started getting rumors, only rumors," Tikhonova said. "Officials came up with an announcement only on May 7. Even then they said, 'Oh, everything's fine, don't worry. Do what you did before.' " She immigrated to the United States in 1990, following her mother and younger sister who had settled in Oakland County in the 1970s. She became a U.S. citizen in 1997. She is married and has two teenaged stepchildren.
How'd she get involved with CARE House?	"One morning" in 2002 "I was drinking my morning tea and reading the newspaper," she said. "Already, I was thinking I wanted to volunteer. There was an article that CARE House had an open house and they invited people who would be interested in volunteering. I decided to just go and check them out. I liked the organization. They are very honest and caring people and they really needed me. They don't waste my time."
What is CARE House?	Part of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County, it's where trained staff members question children who may have been physically or sexually abused, helping to reduce the number of times a child tells a story.
What does she do at CARE House?	"Basically, I just greet people who come in," she said. "My job is to make them feel comfortable and not threatened by anything, especially the kids. So, I play games with the kids. I talk with them and I try to be appropriate for their age. If it's a 4-year-old boy, we'll play with cars."

	But if it's a teenager, I would ask if they were interested in computer games or ask about their schools. I interact with them and show them that people are friendly and lovely and kids are beautiful creatures."
What does she think about the kids she sees?	"My worry initially was how would I feel about seeing a kid who is hurt. Would I start crying? I shared that concern with my supervisor and she said, 'Don't worry; just behave normally.' There is no pity involved."
Why does she do it?	"I feel that it's so important for me as a U.S. citizen to do this because I was not pressured to do this. ...I wanted to benefit my community."
Does CARE House need more volunteers?	Sure, as well as volunteers in other areas, said Laurie Walters, director of volunteers. People can help out at fund-raisers and act as court-appointed special advocates monitoring difficult cases. Call 248-332-7173 anytime, or visit www.carehouse.org or e-mail Walters at lwalters@carehouse.org .
	<i>By Jack Kresnak</i>

Share your tale

Got a story about volunteering or other acts of kindness you'd like to share with Free Press readers through the Giving and Living column? Call reporter Jack Kresnak at 313-223-4544 anytime or e-mail him at jkresnak@freepress

Thursday, June 15, 2006

Unger defense: An accident In closing arguments, prosecutor points to evidence of marital discord

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

BEULAH -- A defense attorney for a Huntington Woods man charged with his wife's 2003 death told a Benzie Circuit Court jury Wednesday that a botched investigation and a series of misunderstandings ultimately led to his client being charged with first-degree murder.

Attorney Robert S. Harrison's client, Mark Unger, 45, is on trial in his wife's Oct. 25, 2003, death at a northern Michigan lakeside resort.

Harrison is expected to conclude his closing arguments before the Benzie Circuit Court jury today, to be followed by prosecution's rebuttal and Judge James M. Batzer's instructions to the jury for both first-degree and second-degree murder.

A jury heard closing arguments from the prosecution and defense attorneys Wednesday. It will decide Unger's innocence or guilt in the death of Florence Unger, 37. She was found floating face down in Lower Herring Lake at the Inn of Watervale resort, about 10 miles south of Frankfort.

Harrison has maintained Florence Unger's death was a tragic accident that happened without any involvement by his client. Harrison said police investigators initially responded to a possible suicide call, then immediately investigated the death as a homicide despite the "death trap" of a faulty railing on the boathouse deck from which Florence Unger fell.

"They searched him, his car, took his clothes and put him in a paper suit," Harrison said. "He can't do anything. He can't even cry without someone saying that was wrong. When he gets down on his hands and knees to retch, they think it's all fake because they thought they caught him red-handed in a lie."

During the seven-week trial, Harrison and the defense team called experts and witnesses to convince the jury of eight men and seven women of several possibilities that a rotted, deteriorated railing may have attributed to her fall from a 12-foot high boathouse deck. And that once she struck the concrete, she likely rolled into the lake or to the edge of the seawall where seizures could have moved her body the remaining inches over the edge. Harrison told the jury that a "botched investigation" was conducted by inexperienced Benzie County Sheriff's deputies and Michigan State Police detectives, who showed up at Watervale that morning and failed to file proper reports, secure the death scene or do routine tests on the body.

Harrison also lectured the jury on a defendant's presumption of innocence.

"The protection is there unless removed by evidence, evidence which you believe is so strong that it is beyond a reasonable doubt," he said.

Donna L. Pendergast, assistant Michigan attorney general, gave a three-hour presentation to the jury in which she discussed marital discord and unusual behavior by

Mark Unger. She said common sense and all the evidence in the woman's death points in only one direction -- directly at Mark Unger.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or *mmartindale@detnews.com*.

Jun 14, 6:24 PM EDT

Attorneys make final pitches to jury in murder case

By JOHN FLESHER
Associated Press Writer

BEULAH, Mich. (AP) -- Attorneys described Mark Unger in starkly different terms - obsessed, selfish killer versus tragic, misunderstood victim - during closing arguments Wednesday in his first-degree murder trial.

"He did what we know he does best: He looked out for number one," prosecutor Donna Pendergast said of Unger, 45, a suburban Detroit man accused of killing his wife during a family trip to a northern Michigan resort in October 2003.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison responded that Unger had been portrayed unfairly - not only during the trial in Benzie County Circuit Court, but by authorities from the outset of the investigation into Florence Unger's death.

"He is no monster and he is no killer," Harrison said.

Both sides began making final pitches to the jury in the seventh week of the trial, during which prosecutors sought to weave together a pattern of circumstantial evidence in hopes of proving Mark Unger's guilt.

They contend he knocked 37-year-old Florence Unger off a boathouse rooftop deck during an argument - possibly over the divorce she was seeking and he adamantly opposed - and later dragged her, unconscious but alive, into Lower Herring Lake, where she drowned.

Unger is pleading not guilty. His attorneys insist the death was accidental.

Closing arguments will continue Thursday. After Judge James Batzer gives the jury final instructions, deliberations will begin.

Pendergast, an assistant Michigan attorney general leading the prosecution team, summarized the state's evidence in firm tones, accompanied by a video presentation that included photos of a smiling Florence Unger and gruesome autopsy scenes.

The Huntington Woods couple's marriage had unraveled by fall 2003, Pendergast said. As Florence Unger solidified her decision to get divorced, Mark Unger's behavior become increasingly erratic, with mood swings like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Despite misgivings, she accompanied her husband and young sons to the Watervale resort the morning of Oct. 24, 2003. "As it turned out, it would be the biggest mistake of her life," Pendergast said.

As the couple stood on the deck overlooking the lake, something triggered an argument, she said. Wounds to Florence Unger's abdomen suggest she was punched or kicked, apparently causing her to fall off the deck.

In most criminal trials, Pendergast said, she warns juries that real-life crime investigations aren't as portrayed on television. "In this case, it is like 'CSI.' The body tells the story."

Autopsy evidence showed Florence Unger was alive but unconscious 90 minutes after hitting the concrete slab, Pendergast said. She might have survived if Mark Unger had sought help. Instead, he returned to the family cottage and "waited for the coast to be clear so he could sneak back down like a rat in the night" to see if she was dead, Pendergast said.

Finally, he dragged her into the water to make sure - "an act of self-preservation," she said.

Harrison countered by reminding jurors of their responsibility to acquit Mark Unger unless convinced his guilt had been proven beyond reasonable doubt - a tough standard that he said the prosecution hadn't met.

"If you have a strong hunch, it's nowhere near enough," he said. "If you think there's a good possibility he did it, it's not enough. If it's more than 50-50, it's not enough."

Harrison attacked the "botched" investigation, saying an emergency dispatcher falsely told police Mark Unger had described his wife as suicidal. That "snowballed into wrongful accusations against Mark" as officers inspected the scene and realized suicide was highly unlikely, he said.

"And the entire investigation goes off in the wrong direction," Harrison said.

Evidence suggesting an accident, such as "the bad condition of the deck," clashed with "their mindset already made up, that Mark lied to them and therefore was in some way responsible for Florence Unger's death."

Harrison told jurors he apologized if any were offended when he spoke of Florence Unger's affair with a neighbor and her fondness for shopping sprees. But doing so was necessary to present a fair picture, he said.

"These prosecutors have portrayed Florence Unger as an angel, a faultless, perfect person," Harrison said. "She was not perfect, just like Mark is not perfect."

Closing Arguments Begin In Murder Trial

Mark Unger Accused In Slaying Of Wife

UPDATED: 5:58 pm EDT June 14, 2006

Mark Unger placed his wife's still-living body into the cold waters of Lower Herring Lake to silence her -- an ultimate act of selfishness by a man who always put himself first, a prosecutor told jurors Wednesday.

"He did what we know he does best: He looked out for number one," Donna Pendergast, an assistant state attorney general, said during closing arguments in Unger's trial on a first-degree murder charge.

Unger knocked Florence Unger off the rooftop deck of a boathouse at the Watervale resort after an argument broke out -- possibly about the divorce she wanted and he desperately sought to avoid, Pendergast said as the seventh week of the trial in Benzie County Circuit Court got under way.

"In the world that Mark Unger lives in, in his mind and the way he views the world, at that point there was no choice but to put Florence Unger in the water," Pendergast said, standing in front of a video screen on which a smiling photo of the dead woman was displayed. "The minute she went over that railing, he knew that life as he knew it was over."

Florence Unger, 37, of Huntington Woods, was found dead the morning of Oct. 25, 2003, her body floating at the shallow edge of the lake. Despite the pending divorce, she had come north with her husband and two young sons for a weekend getaway at the Watervale, about 50 miles southwest of Traverse City.

Unger is pleading not guilty. He did not testify, but told police he left his wife alone on the deck the night of Oct. 24 and went to their nearby cottage to check on their children. When he returned to the dock, Unger said, his wife was gone. Assuming she was visiting the resort's owners, he went back to his cottage and fell asleep.

With no eyewitnesses to Florence Unger's death, prosecutors developed a circumstantial case that portrayed Mark Unger as emotionally unstable and desperate to prevent his wife from leaving him. He had undergone treatment for alcohol and prescription drug abuse in the year before her death.

Friends of Florence Unger testified the couple's marriage was unraveling and she was having an affair with one of her husband's friends.

Unger's attorneys insisted he loved her and never was violent toward her.

A crucial question is how Florence Unger died. If jurors conclude she drowned, they might accept the prosecution's contention that the death was premeditated.

Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic, the Oakland County medical examiner, studied microscopic slides and reports from the autopsy but not the body. He testified Florence Unger drowned and said internal injuries suggested she had been kicked or punched.

But the forensic pathologist who performed the autopsy, Dr. Stephen Cohle of Kent County, listed the cause of death as brain trauma, although he said he couldn't rule out drowning.

Testifying as a defense witness, Wayne County medical examiner Dr. Carl Schmidt sided with Cohle and said it was unclear whether the death was homicide or an accident. A retired engineering professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology presented a series of computer animations showing ways Florence Unger might have fallen accidentally off the deck.

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